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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 000068

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FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/IPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/14/2019
TAGS: KPAL PGOV PREL PHUM CASC EG IS
SUBJECT: EGYPT: GAZA ROUND-UP: JANUARY 14

REF: A. CAIRO 0063
1B. CAIRO 0026
1C. CAIRO 0017
1D. CAIRO 0007
1E. CAIRO 0003
1F. CAIRO 0002

Classified By: Minister Counselor William R. Stewart
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Rafah

11. (S) According to MoD sources, the Rafah border area has been relatively quiet today, with no collateral damage on the Egyptian side, and no reports of Palestinian firing on Egyptian Border Guard Forces.

Demonstrations

12. (SBU) Contacts reported that on January 13, approximately 5,000 protestors from opposition parties and movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), demonstrated in the Delta town of Damietta. Contacts also told us that approximately 6,000 protestors from the MB and the opposition movement Kefaya demonstrated January 13 in the Delta town of Mahalla. According to press reports, 3,000 teachers demonstrated in Sharqiya January 13, and 100 opposition Wafd Party-affiliated lawyers demonstrated in the North Sinai. The MB claimed that clashes broke out between police and demonstrators in Sharqiya. The MB's website reported small demonstrations January 13 in the Delta town of Damanhour.

13. (SBU) A call for a January 15 protest in front of Embassy Cairo that originated on a pro-Gaza Egyptian Facebook group, has now been reported on the website of a small-circulation newspaper, Al Yom Al Sabaa. According to security contacts, the protest organizers do not yet have official permission to demonstrate. Based on information to date, we do not anticipate a large-scale protest developing.

14. (C) Calls are also circulating for January 15 and 18 general strikes in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza. Thus far, the Al Azhar Scholars Union and a small pro-Gaza Facebook group have endorsed the calls; no influential opposition groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, have yet announced their participation. An activist leader from the "April 6 Group" that contributed to organizing the April 2008 Mahalla strike (ref - 08 Cairo 783) told us that his group is not involved in planning these general strikes, and predicted that both the strikes and the Embassy Cairo protest would be ineffective and disorganized. He said he and other April 6 leaders have not participated in demonstrations out of fear of being arrested and held for long periods. He

reported that State Security has not harassed him recently, and speculated this is due to their preoccupation with the nation-wide demonstrations.

Public Opinion

¶15. (SBU) As part of the government's continuing PR campaign to demonstrate its pro-Palestinian credentials, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) sent a senior delegation on January 13 to the Rafah border, to visit hospitals, and deliver to the Palestinian Red Crescent a reported 11-38 ambulances and 20-28 other vehicles loaded with food and medical aid. The delegation was led by NDP secretary general Safwat Sherif, and assistant secretary generals Gamal Mubarak and Mufeed Shehab. Sherif told accompanying journalists that Israel's actions in Gaza are tantamount to a "war crime and state terrorism,⁸ and that "we shall not sacrifice the slightest grain of sand! The lands of the Sinai speak the names of Egypt's martyrs against Israel!⁸ Sherif said that other similar aid convoys would be sent soon by NDP offices in Egypt's provinces.

¶16. (U) The NDP continues to hold rallies across Egypt, in support of Palestinians, and to explain the efforts of the Egyptian government to "end Palestinian suffering.⁸ On January 12, rallies were held Gharbiya (reported 1,200 attendees), Aswan (reported 3,000 attendees), and the coastal town of Marsah Matrouh (no reported number of attendees). A large NDP-organized conference is planned for today in Cairo, which will include NDP MP's and Shura Council members.

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¶17. (U) According to an aggressive pro-government paper, former UNSYG and current President of the National Council for Human Rights Boutros Boutros-Ghali said January 13 that Israel chose the current timeframe to attack Gaza to take advantage of the ongoing U.S. presidential transition and the global financial crisis. The same paper reported that former Ambassador to the U.S. Abdel Raouf El-Reedy said January 13 that Israeli leaders would be in prison if it were not for U.S. "protection" of Israel.

¶18. (U) Debate continued in the People's Assembly on January 12 over the volatile issue of gas exports to Israel. Opposition MP's accused the government of "colluding with the Zionist enemy⁸ by not halting gas exports. Minister for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs (and NDP assistant SYG) Mufeed Shehab replied that Egypt is "doing its best to halt Israeli aggression in Gaza.⁸

¶19. (U) On January 12, 35 MB parliamentarians sent PM Ahmed Nazif a letter calling for the immediate allocation of 500 million LE (roughly \$90.5 million USD) to provide housing in Rafah for displaced Palestinians. The letter also requested that Rafah become a free trade zone where Palestinians can purchase commodities, that the Israeli ambassador be expelled, and that gas exports to Israel cease. The deputy leader of the MB's parliamentary bloc said that a GOE refusal of these requests would be "complicity in Israel's blockade of Gaza.⁸

Humanitarian Issues

¶10. (SBU) Assistance: On January 13, 180 tons of medical assistance was delivered through Rafah and 500 tons of food assistance was delivered through al-Aouja from the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and the Red Crescent. 31 injured Palestinians entered Egypt for medical treatment.

¶11. (C) UN AID Bottleneck: The United Nations Development Program's Resident Representative, James Rawley, reported

that the UN was unable to get enough humanitarian supplies into Gaza through the Rafah crossing yesterday, that more supplies needed to flow in through Rafah, and that other crossings needed to be opened so the UN can meet the humanitarian needs.

¶12. (C) WFP on Gaza: Gianpietro Bordignon, the World Food Program's Country Director for Egypt, told us yesterday that WFP local staff continues to work in Gaza. According to Bordignon, since 2007 the WFP has provided food each day for 265,000 "non-refugee8 Gazans (with UNRWA handling the refugees). The WFP believes that the number of Gazans requiring food aid will increase to 365,000 as a result of the conflict. He said that the WFP has a "two-month supply8 of food in Gaza but distribution and re-supply is difficult because of the security situation and the lack of fuel in Gaza. He said the WFP sent a largely "symbolic8 convoy to Gaza last Friday (with 80 tons of wheat flour and 10 tons of biscuits) which entered Gaza on Sunday through the Kerem Shalom crossing. He also said there is a 3 man WFP logistics team in Al Arish working to coordinate U.N. aid efforts. He said donations had been arriving in an uncoordinated fashion (he cited the arrival of large numbers of anti-malaria kits, unneeded in Gaza, as an example of the lack of coordination) and the team is working to bring order to the effort.

¶13. (S) Sudan/Gaza: Kamal Ali, Head of the Sudanese National Congress Party in Egypt, told us the he is in El-Arish to supervise the delivery of the fifth planeload of medical and food supplies from Sudan for the people of Gaza.

Diplomacy

¶14. (C) Foreign delegations: EU Political Counselor told us today that Italian FM Frattini was likely to arrive in the coming days, and that EU Quartet envoy Marc Otte is planning to visit Rafah in the coming week. Spanish FM Moratinos departed today (January 14). The Japanese political counselor told us January 13 that Middle East envoy Arima,s meetings earlier in the week had included FM Aboul Gheit, EGIS Chief Soliman, and Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa. The Japanese are interesting in the possibility of providing technical assistance to the Rafah border, and perhaps for economic development in the Sinai.

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¶15. (SBU) Arab League summit: As of January 14, it remained unclear as to the location for the summit on the Gaza crisis and review of UNSCR 1860. The Qataris continued to press ahead to obtain the support of 15 member states to hold an emergency summit in Doha, while the Egyptians were arguing that the meeting should be held in Kuwait, to precede the previously scheduled Arab League Summit on Economic and Social Development (to be held January 17-18). The Arab League had yet to make an official announcement clarifying the location.

¶16. (U) UN: UN SYG Ban Ki Moon met with Aboul Gheit and Arab League SYG Moussa today. Ban said that he was unable to go to Gaza, given the situation, but expected to meet UN Gaza employees when he visits Israel (following his stop in Egypt). He reiterated the need for a cease-fire along the lines of UNSCR 1860, and said that the UN would send a team to Gaza to evaluate the damage and humanitarian needs.

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